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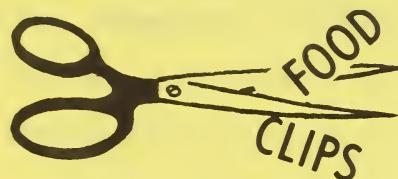




# Food and Home Notes

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Making homemade jelly? If you use too little pectin -- acid or sugar -- it will make it syrupy, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture home economists.

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Crystals form on jelly if too much sugar is used -- or, if you have cooked the mixture too little, too slowly, or too long. Crystals that form at the top of jelly that has been opened and allowed to stand are caused by evaporation of liquid.

\* \* \*

Floating fruit in jam? You can prevent this by making sure the fruit is ripe and is cooked long enough.

\* \* \*

Fruit pectins should be stored in a cool, dry place so they will keep their gel strength. They should not be held over from one year to the next.

\* \* \*

Dried fruit may be cooked in water until tender -- then used to make jams and preserves, with or without added pectin as required.

## FOOD PRICE INFORMATION

### —It's Available

What's ahead for food prices? What are the current trends--and what affects the prices of major foods? An analysis report known as the National Food Situation published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, is issued quarterly concerning reasons for changes in food prices. It calculates total U.S. spending on food as well as reporting on fishery foods and tropical foods such as sugar and coffee.

Prices are taken from the Labor Department's Consumer Price Index--the overall food-price component and its constituent grocery food and eating-out prices.

Single copies of Situation Reports (including those on the Fruit, Vegetable, Livestock and Meat, Dairy, and Poultry and Egg Situations) are all available on request from ERS Information Division, Room 0054-S, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

## HOMEMADE —or Commercial

### Convenience — and the Cost of: Plate Dinner -- Skillet Main Dishes

Home prepared or supermarket (commercially prepared) dinner? If it's a question of time and convenience, you may lean towards purchasing a ready-made dinner -- or a skillet-main dish which means it's partially prepared. The Consumer and Food Economics Institute at the U.S. Department of Agriculture selected foods from supermarkets in Washington, D.C. in April 1974 and found that selected frozen-plate dinners do, in fact, cost more than food prepared "from scratch" at home.

Plate dinners selected for comparison were the ready-to-heat fried chicken and meat-loaf dinners (weight 11 oz.). Two supermarket type chicken dinners were compared: Breast and drumstick (which costs 20 percent more) and the wing and back section (which costs 55 percent more) when compared to the home-prepared dinner based on a whole, ready-to-cook frying chicken.

The frozen meat loaf dinner costs 69 percent more than the one prepared "from scratch" at home.

The partially prepared skillet main dishes compared were ground-beef stroganoff, lasagna, and macaroni-chili beef dinners. Some cost about one-fifth less than their home-prepared counterparts.

Partially-prepared dinners, or the skillet mixes, may be a good buy if you and your family like them -- if your time or cooking skills are limited. They are convenient because most of the major ingredients for an entree are assembled in one package. You may even save money by choosing some of them. The choice must be made by comparing all the factors involved -- not just the cost. And -- nutritional needs (a serving of meat and two vegetables, for example) must also be considered.  
(Chart opposite page.)

*Cost of home-prepared and convenience plate dinners and skillet main dishes<sup>1</sup>*

| Food   | Cost                  |                        | Cost relative to cost of home prepared |                        |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------|
|  | Home prepared         | Convenience            | Home prepared                          | Convenience            |
|  | Cents                 | Cents                  | Percent                                | Percent                |
| <b>Plate dinners:</b>                                  |                       |                        |  |                        |
| Fried chicken with 1.7<br>to 2.4 oz meat .....         | <sup>2</sup> 38-49    | 59                     | 100                                    | 120-155                |
| Meat loaf with 3 oz<br>meat loaf .....                 | 35                    | 59                     | 100                                    | 169                    |
|  | Low-cost <sup>4</sup> | High-cost <sup>4</sup> | Low-cost <sup>4</sup>                  | High-cost <sup>4</sup> |
| <b>Skillet main dishes:<sup>3</sup></b>                |                       |                        |  |                        |
| Ground-beef<br>stroganoff:                             |                       |                        |  |                        |
| Total food pre-<br>pared .....                         | 171                   | 143                    | 183                                    | 100                    |
| Serving as per pkg<br>or recipe .....                  | 43                    | 36                     | 46                                     | 100                    |
| Cup .....  | 36                    | 31                     | 45                                     | 100                    |
| Serving containing 2<br>oz cooked ground<br>beef ..... | 29                    | 24                     | 31                                     | 100                    |
| Macaroni-chili-beef:                                   |                       |                        |  |                        |
| Total food pre-<br>pared .....                         | 172                   | 143                    | 159                                    | 100                    |
| Serving as per pkg<br>or recipe .....                  | 34                    | 29                     | 32                                     | 100                    |
| Cup .....  | 29                    | 28                     | 32                                     | 100                    |
| Serving containing 2<br>oz cook ground<br>beef .....   | 31                    | 25                     | 27                                     | 100                    |
| Lasagna:   |                       |                        |  |                        |
| Total food pre-<br>pared <sup>5</sup> .....            | 203                   | 159                    | 184                                    | 100                    |
| Serving as per pkg<br>or recipe .....                  | 34                    | 32                     | 37                                     | 100                    |
| Cup .....  | 34                    | 32                     | 45                                     | 100                    |
| Serving containing 2<br>oz cooked ground<br>beef ..... | 34                    | 27                     | 31                                     | 100                    |

<sup>1</sup> Prices from 3 Washington, D.C., supermarkets, April 1974.<sup>2</sup> Low-cost homemade dinner corresponds to plate dinner yielding 1.7 ounces of cooked meat (wing and back section); high-cost homemade dinner corresponds to plate dinner yielding 2.4 ounces of cooked meat (breast and drumstick).<sup>3</sup> 1 pound raw ground beef was used in all main dishes.<sup>4</sup> The lowest and highest priced brand of each of the skillet dinner mixes available in the Washington, D.C., stores were selected for the study.<sup>5</sup> Homemade recipe yields 6 servings; mixes yield 5 servings.

## FARM EXPORTS -- and How They Benefit Consumers

Do food exports raise domestic food prices? U.S. Department of Agriculture economists estimate that between one-third and one-half of the increase in domestic food prices resulted from the rise in agricultural exports during fiscal 1973. However -- higher domestic food costs were more than canceled out by money pouring back into the economy -- such as -- an additional \$4.5 billion cash output in the nonfarm business section -- \$2.3 billion of additional gross farm products and \$2.0 billion decline in Government spending on farm programs.

The total measurable dollar contribution to the National economy amounted to as much as \$8.8 billion -- or \$44.38 per person. This not only offset the \$21.75 export-related increase in the per-person domestic food bill, but left a profit of \$22.63 per person.

What else did farm exports do? Our export dollars bought considerably more foreign goods. The higher rate of output on American farms also meant lower per-unit production costs for that 80 percent of our food that is consumed here at home.

World food supplies were somewhat tighter, and incomes were higher around the world so other nations bid increasingly higher prices for American agricultural commodities. U.S. incomes were higher, too -- consumers were bidding more. Tensions were eased in the Soviet Union and in the People's Republic of China through food exports which provided the basis for opening up trade.

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NOTE: Additional information for the MEDIA and photographs (when applicable) may be obtained from: Shirley Wagener, Editor of Food and Home Notes, Room 535-A, Office of Communication/Press Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Or telephone: 202-447-5898.

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